

NEWSLETTER

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ATTRACTING *and* DEVELOPING HIGH-QUALITY TEACHERS

Researchers, policymakers, and education leaders agree that teacher quality is a vital factor in improving student achievement. Therefore, it is imperative that states and districts recruit, develop, and retain high-quality teachers to ensure that all children are provided with an adequate education. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) initially required that all practicing public school teachers across the nation be deemed highly qualified by the end of the 2005–06 school year. Despite the demand for more highly qualified teachers, most states did not meet this benchmark. Even though the deadline was extended an additional year, some states and districts still face a major teacher crisis.

High teacher turnover rates and teacher shortages—especially in areas such as mathematics, science, and special education—have left many states and districts scrambling to find ways to recruit and/or develop highly qualified teachers. This month's newsletter highlights several strategies that may be useful in attracting and developing high-quality teachers.

Recruitment Plan

Districts are working diligently to find effective ways to attract highly qualified teachers to their districts and are increasingly becoming more strategic with their recruitment plans. Author Nedra Atwell (2006) suggests that a successful recruitment plan does the following:

- Requires a recruitment strategic planning team.
- Develops marketing and outreach strategies.
- Forms partnerships with traditional teacher education institutions and alternative licensure programs.
- Evaluates the hiring process.
- Provides financial incentives.

The recruitment strategic planning team could include district staff as well as school-based personnel such as principals and teachers. Involving all stakeholders in the process gives everyone greater ownership of the process and can make it much more effective. Atwell suggests that to be most effective, the planning team should develop a clear mission, assess the needs of the district, and collect data to evaluate the effectiveness of the recruitment plan.

Marketing and outreach are key elements of the recruitment process. Many states have developed programs, such as Kentucky's Leadership Academy and its Teacher Cadet Program, to attract middle school and high school students to the teaching profession. Marketing strategies also should include various media outlets to inform potential teachers about opportunities available in the district. Consider using mediums (print materials, radio, and television) to advertise job vacancies and to highlight positive happenings in the district. Utilize the Internet to post employment opportunities and allow prospective teachers to complete applications.

Forming partnerships with local colleges and universities is a great way to recruit teachers. One study that tracked how applicants found out about their alternative certification program discovered that the majority of potential teachers learned about the program and job opportunities in their districts from their college advisors or professors (Abell et al., 2006).

The hiring process itself can deter potential teachers from applying if the process is too cumbersome and time consuming. Find ways to reduce the amount of time and paperwork that it takes to complete the application and/or hiring process. For instance, Virginia's Teach in Virginia program enables teacher applicants to submit one application to multiple understaffed districts (Spradlin & Prendergast, 2006). In Indiana, the Consolidation of Professional Standards Board was created within the Indiana Department of Education to expedite licensure processing (Spradlin & Prendergast, 2006). Several states are using licensure reciprocity as another way to quickly and efficiently get teachers deemed highly qualified into another state's school system.

Research has shown that financial incentives such as signing bonuses can greatly increase the number of teachers a district hires for the school year (Atwell, 2006; Spradlin & Prendergast, 2006; Strunk & Robinson, 2006). Some districts offer signing bonuses that require teachers to sign a contract guaranteeing employment with the district or a specific school for a specified number of years. This is especially true in rural and low-income urban schools because they tend to have more teachers teaching out of their field and teachers with the least experience. Additionally, low-income urban schools have higher teacher turnover rates than other schools (Strunk & Robinson, 2006). As a result, some districts

are offering financial incentives for veteran teachers to teach in hard-to-staff schools. For instance, New York City offers high-need subject-area teachers with at least two years of teaching experience who commit to teach in hard-to-staff schools up to \$5,000 up front for housing expenses and a \$400 monthly housing stipend for two years (Spradlin & Prendergast, 2006). Yet, it is important to note that financial incentives alone will not keep teachers in districts or those hard-to-staff schools. Financial incentives coupled with other strategies such as teacher induction programs, mentorship programs, professional development, supportive leadership, and teacher collaboration opportunities during the school day are much more effective in retaining teachers in a district.

"Grow Your Own"

Many states and districts are encouraging paraprofessionals and uncertified teachers who are already in classrooms to become fully licensed teachers by offering them financial assistance to complete their certification. For example, the Illinois "Grow Your Own" Teacher Education Initiative funds teacher preparation programs to support paraeducators and parents in becoming teachers (Spradlin & Prendergast, 2006). In an effort to increase the number of teachers in content areas of high need such as special education, science, and mathematics, districts are offering college scholarships and other financial aid to students who major in those identified areas with an agreement to teach in the district or hard-to-staff schools for a specified amount of time once they graduate.

Some states and districts are working with their state legislature to enable retired teachers to come back to the classroom without losing pension benefits. In 2006, Hawaii enacted a law that allows a district to rehire retired classroom teachers to teach full time in understaffed schools or high-need subject areas (Spradlin & Prendergast, 2006).

Attracting midcareer professionals to the teaching profession is another strategy to increase the number of teachers in a district. However, districts must be able to adequately compensate these potential teachers in order to compete with other industries. Districts can offer better health care coverage and increased opportunities for advancement as well as emphasize incentives such

as summer vacations and holiday breaks. Once hired, it is imperative that these individuals enroll in an alternative licensure program to obtain proper certification and ensure that they can demonstrate competency in the subject area they will teach. Alternative licensure programs should provide proper training in pedagogy, including effective teaching methods, content knowledge, and actual classroom experience (Atwell, 2006; Masci & Stotko, 2006). The district also should provide these teachers with adequate support such as continual professional development and/or a veteran teacher mentor to ensure their success in the classroom.

Developing High-Quality Teachers

To ensure that teachers are adequately prepared, districts should form partnerships with local teacher preparation programs and alternative licensure programs. Through these partnerships, districts can advocate that specific needs—such as working with students with different learning abilities or learning effective classroom management strategies—be addressed while future teachers are enrolled in school (Masci & Stotko, 2006). Districts also could use these partnerships to provide adequate support and preparation to specific groups of teachers who are more likely to leave the profession. For example, special education teachers and nonminority teachers who teach in schools with large populations of minority students are more likely to leave their jobs (Strunk & Robinson, 2006). Districts that serve high populations of these students may collaborate with teacher preparation programs to ensure that teachers are prepared to work successfully by incorporating differentiated instruction or culturally responsive teaching into the teacher training program.

An Alliance for Excellent Education report, *Tapping the Potential: Retaining and Developing High-Quality New Teachers*, strongly suggests that districts implement new teacher induction programs. The report recommends that a comprehensive induction program begin before teachers get into the classroom to integrate “beginners into the [teaching] profession by guiding their work, further developing their skills, and evaluating their performance during the first few years of teaching” (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006, p. 8). New

teacher induction programs may begin prior to the start of classes, but it is essential that the induction program remains continual throughout the first one to two years of each new teacher’s career.

Connecticut’s Beginner Educator Support and Training (BEST) program requires new teachers to submit a portfolio of their work—including sample lesson plans and student work, videotapes of classroom teaching, and reviews of the teacher from school administrators—at the end of their second year of teaching. Each portfolio is evaluated and scored. Scores on the portfolio determine whether new teachers are “further licensed to teach in the state” (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006, p. 19). Teachers who do not score well are provided additional assistance until they can demonstrate proficiency. The BEST program provides opportunities for teacher collaboration, offers ongoing professional development, and pairs new teachers with experienced teachers who support new teachers by modeling effective practices, assisting with developing lesson plans, observing their lessons, and providing critical feedback to new teachers. *Tapping the Potential* also notes that in addition to serving as mentors and instructional leaders, veteran teachers also could benefit from participating in induction programs to enhance their own pedagogical skills. Induction programs allow veteran teachers to stay current on new strategies and promising instructional practices in their field. Additionally, the report suggests districts continue to provide opportunities throughout the year for new teachers to learn how to use data to drive instruction, differentiate instruction to meet the needs of all students, ensure that the taught curriculum is aligned with the content standards, and better understand the culture of their students and school.

Understandably, some states and/or districts may question their ability to initiate a comprehensive induction program due to limited funding or resources. *Tapping the Potential* recommends that districts utilize NCLB Title II funds to finance the induction program because those funds can be used for the preparation, training, and recruitment of high-quality teachers and principals. For example, Indiana uses Title II funds to provide professional development for content knowledge and pedagogical practices, instructional practices, and leadership development (Spradlin & Prendergast, 2006).

Conclusion

Implementing the strategies highlighted in this newsletter will steer districts in the right direction toward attracting and developing high-quality teachers. However, no one strategy alone will significantly make a difference in recruiting or developing highly qualified teachers. To be most effective, districts should assess their needs and incorporate several strategies in their recruitment plan to increase the number of highly qualified teachers.

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